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Future Farming in Cuba

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FUTURE FARMING IN CUBA¹

THE late presidential election in Cuba was conducted in a manner that would have done credit to any Republic in the Americas. The voting was performed without the slightest disorder, and the result distinctly expressed the popular will. The advance toward able and wise self-government which has been made in Cuba since the island became independent is truly remarkable when gauged by an appreciative understanding of the difficulties which lay in the way of progress. Political conditions have greatly improved and there is a tendency in the right direction. The people are becoming constantly less susceptible to the appeal of agitators, and the Government is displaying ever-increasing power to deal promptly and effectively with annoying situations.

With the establishment of order and the consequent creation of confidence among capitalists Cuba will enter upon an era of industrial expansion and widespread prosperity—a state which shall involve the welfare of all classes. The conditions that are creating Cuba's opportunity have been in the making for many years, and are now growing acute. In the United States and the manufacturing countries of Europe the demand for foodstuffs is pressing hard upon the supply. Increase of population is outstripping increase of farm products. Nations which in the past have been great exporters of meat and cereals are steadily shipping less, and before long will have become importers.

Latin-American countries are finding ever-expanding markets for the yield of their soil. Lying directly in the principal Panama Canal routes, Cuba is singularly well situated to play a prominent part in meeting this growing demand. It is hardly necessary to add that her wonderfully rich land and splendid growing climate give her unsurpassed advantages in the matter of production. The island is capable of almost unlimited development. Sugar and tobacco are the products which are to-day scientifically cultivated and raised in adequate quantities. Less than 15 per cent of the arable land is turned to good account, and little of it is worked to its utmost possibility of production. Even in the leading industries, where the manufacturing methods have been well-nigh perfected, there is room for improvement in the field processes. Vast, as is the value of Cuba's annual output, much less than one-fourth of her resources have been

¹ By Forbes Lindsay.



HARBOR AND WATER FRONT AT HAVANA, CUBA.

Of the \$40,000,000 worth of foodstuffs purchased by Cuba annually considerably more than half of this quantity consists of products that might be raised on the island itself.

developed. With well-directed effort and the aid of capital the island may be made within the life of a generation to treble its present yield from the soil and to support in comfort a population of 5,000,000. And this would be but a moderate measure of its ultimate possibilities.

The potential development of agriculture in Cuba has been overshadowed by its two dominant industries and discounted by the methods of farming prevalent on the island. Misconception has been induced by the failures of colonies and individual settlers, the former promoted under unfavorable conditions and the latter having undertaken tasks for which they had neither aptitude nor sufficient means. Successful farming in Cuba, as elsewhere, necessitates previous experience, knowledge of local conditions, and adequate capital. A great majority of failures are traceable to lack of one or more of these requisites.

A glance at the list of Cuban imports reveals a peculiar economic state which will doubtless receive the careful consideration of economists and statesmen.

Upward of \$40,000,000 worth of foodstuffs are purchased by the Cubans annually. Considerably more than half of this quantity consists of things that might be produced on the island. More than that, several of the items in question represent products which might be raised in Cuba to an extent sufficient to supply the domestic demand and leave a considerable surplus for exportation. This is, of course, only contemplated as an ultimate possibility. Let Cuba aim for the present at filling the demands of her home markets for such products as may be raised within her borders.

Except for the heavily capitalized corporations which are engaged in the sugar and tobacco industries, agricultural effort in Cuba is confined mainly to individual natives and foreign settlers. The Chinese truck gardeners are an important factor in furnishing vegetables to the local market and demonstrating what may be done by intensive cultivation.

The natives farm in a primitive manner, under what may be called a "system," because the same practices are prevalent throughout the island. They are not as haphazard as they appear to be, but are, in fact, the intelligent result of experience of the easiest way of procuring a subsistence from a small patch of land. The *guajiro* has had neither the knowledge nor the inducement to make his land more productive. Until recently there was no market open to anything that he might have produced and only the most limited means of transportation. Now there are excellent roads and extensive railway lines, both constantly on the increase. There is no doubt but that when he is taught how to produce a larger crop and assured of a sale for his surplus he will make the required effort. But before this is asked of him there must be an adjustment of land tenure. Lease-



ROAD CONSTRUCTION IN CUBA.

Extensive road building has been going on throughout the island and has rendered transportation facilities more adequate. This, in turn, should afford greater opportunities for profitable farming.



A COUNTRY ROAD IN CUBA.

Such roads, coupled with the wonderfully rich land and splendid growing climate, give to Cuba exceptional advantages for increasing her agricultural products.

holds should be as often as possible perpetual and on terms which will preclude the possibility of rents being unduly raised as the profits of the tenants increase. The system of land taxation should be regulated so as to encourage improvement, lying most lightly upon the enterprising man and falling most heavily upon the owner of idle property. It would be the part of wisdom to exempt the small cultivator entirely from direct taxation. Under existing circumstances he contributes his full share of the revenues through the medium of his purchases of imported articles. The Government should establish an agricultural bank to furnish moderate credit at feasible rates of interest. There is every reason to believe that the success of such a measure would be as great in Cuba as it has been in Egypt. The conditions of farming are much more favorable in the former country than in the latter. His midday rest is well earned by several hours' work in the field before the city dweller has taken his early coffee.

The chief essentials to the improvement of Cuban farming are at hand. The problem is to turn to account resources which are now being wasted or improvidently used. Fertile land and a genial climate are amply available. The necessary complement to these is the cessation of "cultivation by exploitation" and the adoption of cultivation with conservation. The Cuban farmer must be induced to care for his land and to make it profitably productive. He will respond to stimuli if intelligently applied to him. Show him the way, furnish him the means, and give him assurance of a reward for exertion and he will acquit himself creditably in a short while.

The Cuban may not be easily moved by theoretical argument, but he is peculiarly susceptible to the force of an object lesson. Give him a concrete example of how he may increase his crops by intelligent treatment of his land, and with little more effort than he expends upon getting a bare living from it, and he may be depended upon to act on the suggestion.

This is a work which should be carried on by the Government, the railroads, and the land companies. It must be pursued in a practical manner, bringing the lessons right home to the man to be educated. Even in the United States, where the intelligence of the farmer is of a high order, the influence of experiment stations and railway demonstration cars is immeasurably greater than that of scientific books.

Efforts on the part of the Government and other agencies to promote general agriculture can not fail to attract to Cuba the immigration necessary to the fuller development of the country. It contains abundant land that may be cultivated with less outlay and greater yield than the average irrigated land of the western United States. The Cuban enterprise will also return a larger profit on investment under the advantageous conditions which are con-

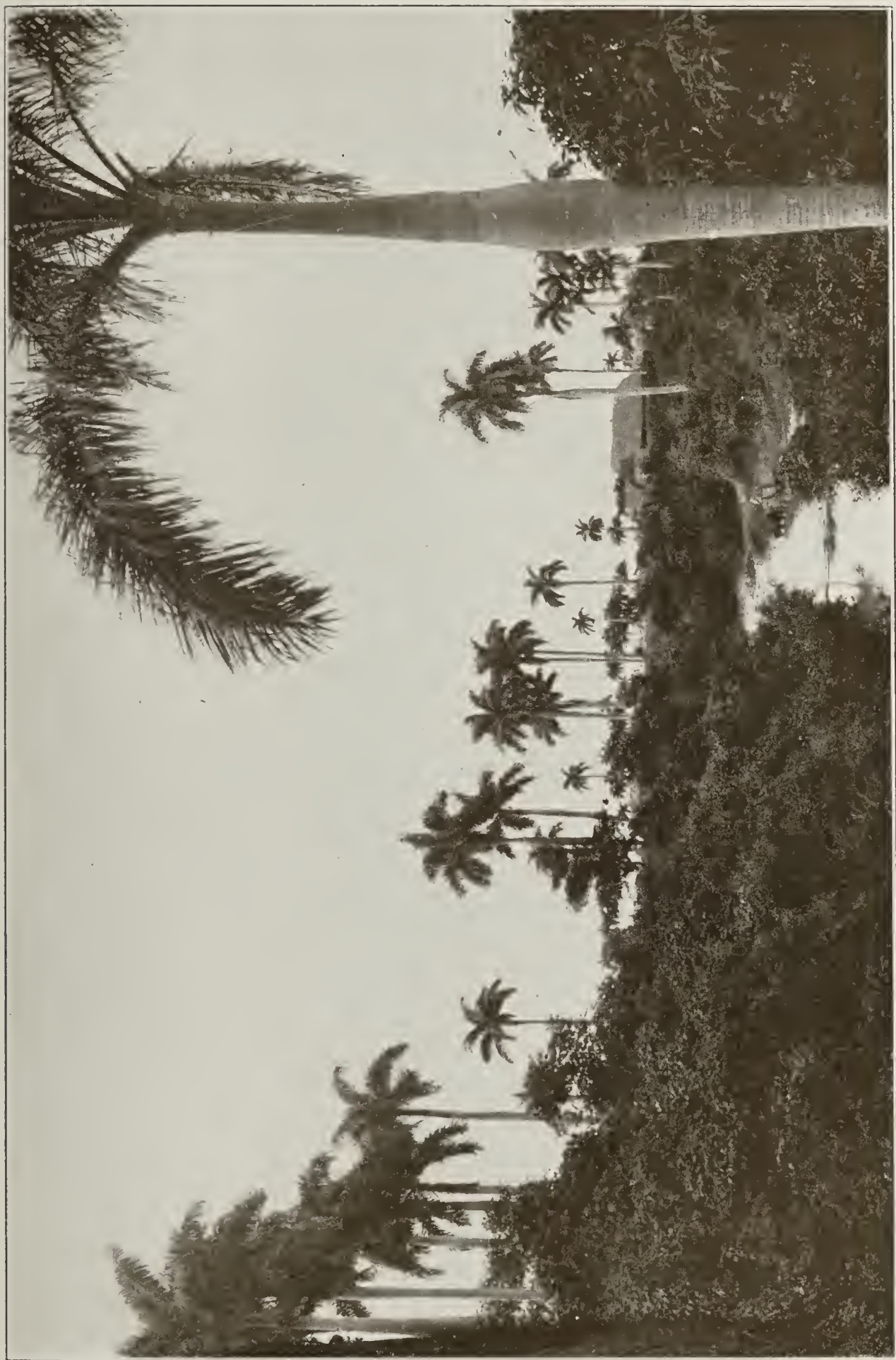


TYPICAL "COLONY HOUSE" OF AMERICAN AND CANADIAN CITRUS FRUIT GROWERS IN EASTERN CUBA.



AN EXHIBIT OF CITRUS FRUITS AND VEGETABLES RAISED IN THE PROVINCE OF CAMAGUEY, CUBA.

The island is capable of almost unlimited development, yet less than 15 per cent of the arable land is turned to good account, while little of it is worked to its utmost possibility of production.



SOME OF THE FERTILE LAND IN CUBA AWAITING DEVELOPMENT.

Abundant land of this character is available for cultivation, and agriculturists claim that it will yield, with lesser outlay, a greater produce than the average irrigated land of the western United States.

templated, provided the cultivator exercises discrimination in the selection of his crops. Heretofore foreigners taking up agricultural pursuits in Cuba have bought high-priced acreage and engaged in citrus fruit growing or some form of fancy farming, generally with unsatisfactory results. It has been demonstrated that comparatively cheap land, such as is available in every Province of the island, can be made to produce large crops of staple foodstuffs with regularity and great profits.

A few illustrations will suffice to indicate the field of opportunity open to the small farmer in Cuba.

Nearly a quarter of a million dollars is paid annually by the islanders for foreign potatoes of a quality inferior to those which they raise at home. Indeed, the best Cuban potatoes rival the famed product of Bermuda. This should be an article of export from Cuba, as well as various spring vegetables, for which there is practically unlimited demand in New York.

Another costly item of import is corn, or maize. Experiments have proved that excellent results may be had with this cereal on ordinary Cuban land. At present it is raised only for use as fodder. The crop is deficient in quantity and poor in quality. With reasonable care in seed selection and cultivation, including rotation in planting, corn may be grown upon comparatively cheap land and marketed at a handsome profit.

There are thousands of acres of land in Cuba lying idle or earning less than 5 per cent a year on \$20 an acre that could be made to produce two heavy crops of alfalfa every year. This fact, among others of a similarly significant character, has been established by the test work of Prof. Karutz at the Camaguez experiment station of the Cuba Railroad. Alfalfa is not raised at all in Cuba at present, while the island pays about as much annually for imported hay as it does for potatoes, and it is an expensive commodity in Habana and other cities.

General agriculture in Cuba offers a promising field for corporate enterprise. The story of the banana industry is indicative of what may be done in other directions. There was no shipment of this fruit from the island until the United Fruit Co. established the industry but a few years ago. Now the United States buys upward of \$1,000,000 worth of Cuban bananas yearly.

A corporation entering upon agricultural development in Cuba should command ample means and the services of a manager thoroughly familiar with crop conditions on the island. A man who is reckoned as one of the most expert in practical Cuban agriculture, and one of the most conversant with the conditions of it, expressed to the writer the conviction that a company investing \$100,000 in



THE DOCKS AT DAIQUIRE THE NORTHERN TERMINUS OF THE CUBA RAILROAD.

1,000 acres of land and having as much again for working capital should, under proper management, earn from \$40,000 to \$50,000 net annually. This proposition was indorsed by three other men of similar reputation.

The suggested method of operation for such a company contemplates the leasing of its land in small tracts to be cultivated under its direction. The company would furnish each tenant with a dwelling, implements, seed, and other necessities, after the manner of the Canadian land corporations, which are attracting so many Americans to the Dominion. These concerns will put the moneyless man in possession of a fully equipped farm and a furnished home if he can satisfy them of his capacity as a farmer. It is believed that a somewhat similar method of colonization might be practiced with success in Cuba. In the plan for the latter country, however, the same degree of independence is not proposed. It is suggested that the tenant farmer should devote his holding to such crops as the company's manager might direct, and that the corporation should harvest and market the output, allowing to the cultivator a certain percentage of the net proceeds.

There are sufficiently numerous examples of shining success to prove that farming in Cuba may be made highly profitable. And this is the conclusion to which an intelligent survey of all the relative conditions must lead. When efficient farming becomes the general practice instead of the exception, the island will be the most productive area in the world of its size.

